

Presentation to the Planning Assessment Commission—Non-Aboriginal Heritage—Drayton South Coal Project

SLIDE 1 TITLE SLIDE

Members of the PAC, ladies and gentlemen

My name is Sharon Veale, I am a Partner and Director at GML Heritage. I am a public historian and urban planner with twenty years' experience in cultural heritage with specific experience in the assessment of historic cultural landscapes.

The Upper Hunter Valley is a significant historical landscape. The former PACs and the government through its SEARS recognised the area as having cultural significance due to its unique topography and landforms, with historic and continuing landuse patterns and built heritage structures. Previous PACs formed the view that the area may warrant heritage listing at State and/or National level.

Since 2013, GML Heritage has been involved in the ongoing review of the technical reports, assessments and requirements for non-Aboriginal heritage that have been prepared for the Drayton South Coal Project (DSCP).

Despite the time that has elapsed, key concerns and issues remain with regards to the assessments and the potential material impacts on the cultural values of non-Aboriginal heritage.

SLIDE 2 KEY POINTS NON-AB HERITAGE

Given this, I would like to address the following key points:

1. Non-Aboriginal cultural values have not been adequately considered

The SEARs required that the non-Aboriginal heritage assessment pay attention to the area's settlement by Europeans and its pastoral history. To date, no comprehensive and holistic assessment regarding the

cultural heritage significance of the Upper Hunter landscape has been prepared.

There is a National Trust (NT) listing for the Muswellbrook Jerrys Plains Landscape Conservation Area (LCA) that dates from 1984. At that time, LCAs were selected for their ability to demonstrate 'exceptional natural and cultural values'.

The existing technical assessments do not include an up to date assessment of the significance of the NT LCA. Heritage legislation and heritage practice have evolved over the last 30 years. Best practice is that significance assessments are periodically reviewed and re-assessed, including in the context of Environmental Impact Assessment.

In my view an area that was identified as 'exceptional' by the National Trust over 3 decades ago, would be highly likely to satisfy one or more of the state and/or national assessed under the listing

SLIDE 3 UPPER HUNTER SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

One of the key findings of the former PAC was that 'the additional value derived from the surrounding cultural landscape setting and the continuity of land uses on the properties has not been recognised to any clear extent or given any meaningful consideration' (PAC 10 December 2013 p12).

The non-Aboriginal assessments for the Drayton South Coal Project have demonstrated a continuing bias to impacts on tangible heritage items, without regard to the historic and continuing cultural landscape and associated intangible values. This bias has resulted in an assessment that is deficient as it does not adequately assess all heritage values.

Cultural significance comes first

This, leads me to my next point, which is that cultural significance needs to be understood before decisions about future management are made. This is a fundamental tenet of the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter

(Article 6 Burra Charter), our industry's best practice guideline and standard.

In the absence of an integrated, adequate and comprehensive assessment of cultural significance how can informed decisions about future management and conservation be made?

The Department's assessment report suggests that the project may proceed subject to a Heritage Management Plan being prepared. This is contrary to professional heritage practice. It is the cart before the horse.

Conclusion

Given the cultural heritage assessment work to date, it is not possible to make sound well-informed decisions about the nature and extent of the impacts on cultural heritage.

An integrated heritage assessment of the history, aesthetic qualities, social and spiritual values of the Upper Hunter remains outstanding. Yet such values are evidenced through the evolving historic cultural landscape associated with the equine industry which reflects specific techniques of sustainable land use and the characteristics and limits of the natural environment.

Further, the significance of the equine industry in the Upper Hunter is renowned internationally. In my view it is a cultural landscape, comparable to that of the Mount Lofty Ranges, SA, which is currently the subject of a nomination to the World Heritage List for its unique qualities as a working, evolving agricultural region.

SLIDE 4 WHL CRITERIA

If successful, the nomination would recognise Mount Lofty Range as being of Outstanding Universal Value to all humanity. It would place the region on a list alongside other internationally renowned agricultural landscapes.

The Drayton south project will irrevocably impact the Upper Hunter which is a significant historic associative cultural landscape.

SLIDE 5 MOUNT LOFTY AND UPPER HUNTER

This project will generate a range of risks and adverse impacts on the heritage significance of non-Aboriginal cultural landscape that cannot be adequately managed through conditions of consent.

The scale and magnitude of the proposed development activity is not reversible and once the historically evolved cultural landscape is removed the values and significance is lost for current and future generations.